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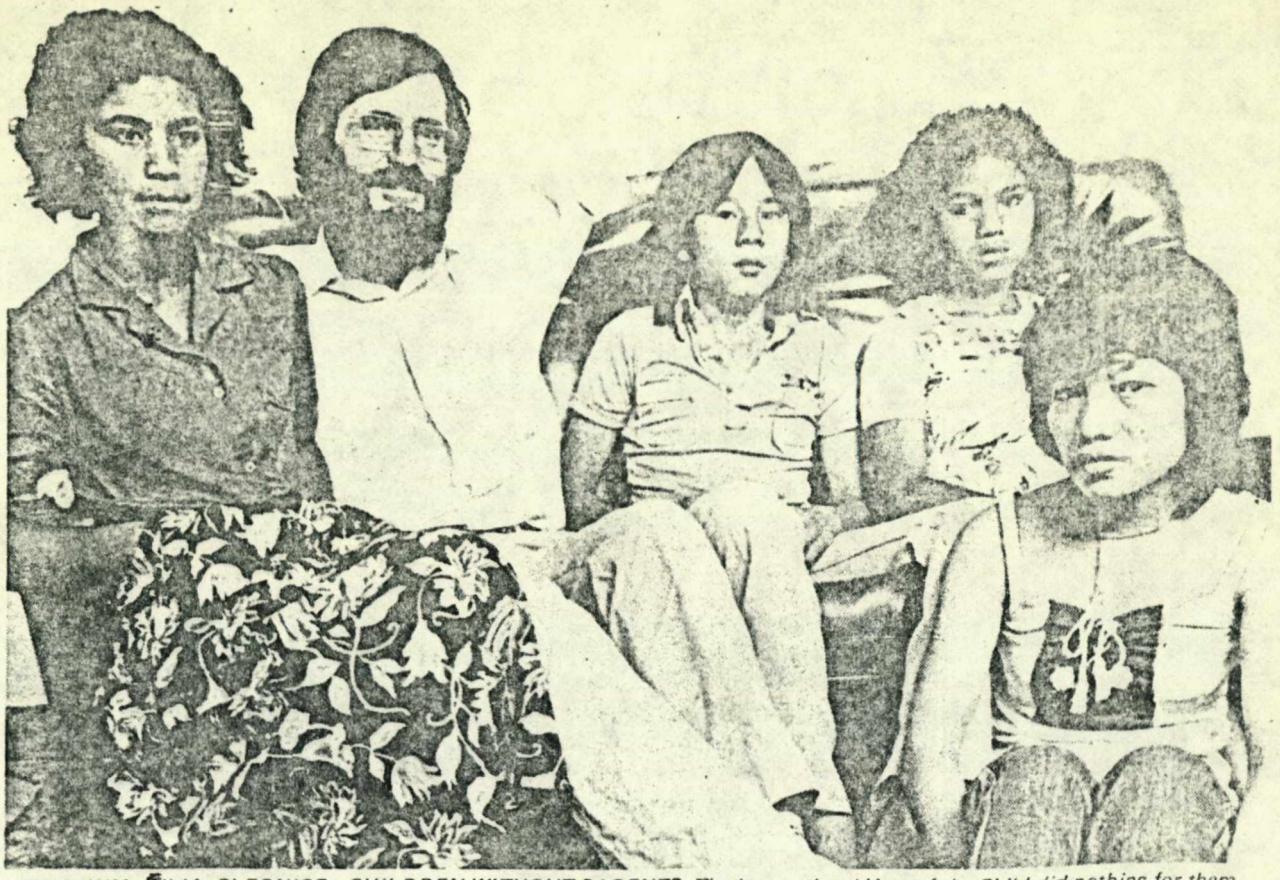

TINA, KIM, JULIA, CLEONICE: CHILDREN WITHOUT PARENTS. The International Year of the Child did nothing for them.

Children Without Parents

There are some 50-60 Timorese minors in Australia who are classified as 'isolated or unattached children'. They fled to Australia in the confusion of mid-1975 leaving their parents behind in Timor. They are now cared for by other Timorese around Australia. An Education Department consultant has commented that despite this care, however, "loss of loved ones by death and/or separation has been the greatest trauma and is a constant source of continuing anxiety as the possibility of family reunion becomes more remote". News about the situation in East Timor and the irregularity and brevity of letters from relatives only add to this anxiety.

Their parents are not on the agreed list of 625. Apart from the few who, in 1975-76, were issued with Letters of Authority to enter Australia, or promises thereof, the only hope of reunion for most of them is to return to East Timor. Understandably neither parents nor children want this. Because of the suffering in Timor their plea is for reunion in Australia.

Australian Government policy does not permit minors to sponsor immigrants (though the waiving of this policy in 1975-76 clearly implies there is nothing immutable about it). Nor will the Immigration Department offer a second chance to those children who in the confusion of 1975 failed to nominate their parents. Further some who did nominate in 1975-76 were denied 'promissory letters' because the Department mistakenly assumed that their absence from home at the time of their evacuation from Timor meant they had been 'adopted out'.

Kim Teng, for example, was 11 years old when he arrived in Australia as a refugee in September 1975, accompanied by an aunt with whom he now lives. The aunt learned later her husband had been killed during the Indonesian invasion. Kim left behind his parents and four younger brothers and sisters. He was in Dili at the time of the evacuation where he had been sent to attend Chinese primary school. His parents lived in Manatuto.

Kim claims to have nominated his parents late in 1975. The Immigration Department, however, has no record of this nomination and states that his first nomination is dated November 1976. He has written several letters to immigration officials and the Minister pleading for his parents to be allowed to come. These and other representations have all been turned down. One letter of reply read as follows:

"Normal Immigration Policy permits the entry of working age parents provided that the sponsoring son or daughter has been in Australia for at least three years and that:

(a) where the parents have three children at least one is in Australia;

(b) where the parents have four or five children at least two are in Australia; and

(c) where the parents have more than five children at least three must be in Australia.

. . . Although you have been in Australia for more than three years your application cannot be accepted because your parents have five children and only one of the five, yourself, is in Australia". (30.8.79)

It seems they could come if they had only two other children besides Kim . . .

Kim's parents are now in Jakarta. They arrived there in June 1979, nine months ago, on the first stage of an attempt to get to Australia. The Australian Government continues to refuse to admit them. Meanwhile the pressure on Kim continues to grow, perhaps, some adult Timorese fear, until breaking point. O